

[00:00:35.680] - Intro

Welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Your host is the founder of The UK Travel Planning website, Tracy Collins. In this podcast, Tracy shares destination guides, travel tips, and itinerary ideas, as well as interviews with a variety of guests who share their knowledge and experience of UK travel to help you plan your perfect UK vacation. Join us as we explore the UK from cosmopolitan cities, to quaint villages, from historic castles to beautiful islands and from the picturesque countryside to seaside towns.

[00:00:37.340] - Tracy

Hi, and welcome to Episode 47 of the UK Travel Planning podcast. In this episode, we are talking about practical tips for visiting the UK with your top 10 frequently asked questions answered. That wasn't very easy to say, Doug.

[00:00:52.700] - Doug

No, it wasn't.

[00:00:53.750] - Tracy

This week, Doug and I are back to go through the 10 questions that we get asked most often about general travel to the UK. There are a couple in here about London, but mainly we've done about the general things that we get asked. So we've come up with 10, haven't we?

[00:01:12.320] - Doug

We have, yeah.

[00:01:13.680] - Tracy

So we're going to just get straight into it. So the biggest question we're asked is where do I find information about planning my trip to the UK? So our answer is through the UK Travel Planning website, the London Travel Planning website, this podcast, our private Facebook community, which is the UK and London Travel Planning Facebook group, or the UK Train Travel Tips Facebook group, which Doug runs. You can join our email list and get newsletters. Also, you can buy our ebooks such as our...

[00:01:48.670] - Doug

Our Guide to the UK Train Travel.

[00:01:50.330] - Tracy

Our London Travel Guide and Itinerary Planner, and our Best of Britain Itinerary Planners. So we have loads of resources for you. We have lots and lots of articles on both websites and constantly adding new things on. Join our Facebook community. Come and chat. Come and meet us. Come and ask questions in there. So really, UK Travel Planning has absolutely everything that you need to plan your perfect UK vacation. But that answer that question.

[00:02:18.650] - Doug

I read the number two out there.

[00:02:20.080] - Tracy

Okay, then you go.

[00:02:20.830] - Doug

For it. What are the options for connecting to the internet in the UK?

[00:02:25.690] - Tracy

Okay, so we get asked that question. Maybe once, twice, three times, four times a day in the Facebook group. So this comes up quite a lot. And I understand why. This is something that really always freaks me out. I always get a bit like, so how am I going to make sure I connect to the internet?

[00:02:41.400] - Doug

Well, that's it. We all rely on connectivity wherever we are.

[00:02:44.480] - Tracy

Absolutely. So basically, you've got five options. You can go for free WiFi. Most hotels in the UK do have free WiFi, and you'll find it lots of hotspots all over the place. So you'll find it museums, coffee shops, fast food restaurants. So you can get free WiFi. Obviously, the downside of that is, often it's not often not secure. So you need to think about having a VPN on your phone or device.

[00:03:05.560] - Doug

Again, I would say the train stations, but also many train operators have a free WiFi now.

[00:03:10.870] - Tracy

Yeah, they do. Absolutely. So that is one. If you really want to save some money, you can access free WiFi. The second option is to use a portable WiFi device such as Skyrim Solace, which actually Doug and I use. We prefer that because if we're traveling together, we can tether laptops to it, ipads to it, phones to it. And it worked out pretty well for us in the UK last year, didn't it?

[00:03:34.540] - Doug

It did. We used the GPS a lot as well.

[00:03:37.450] - Tracy

Yeah. So it was really good. So that's an option. And that's really good because there's quite a few of you travelling together. Another option is that obviously you can contact your mobile provider in whichever country you're in and check what their international plan is and arrange for day pass. We do find that can be quite expensive, but obviously that's something you need to check out with your provider. And some have international calling that are built in, which I know is quite important for some people if you want to be able to make phone calls. But really just take note of how much that's going to cost and what your limits on data are and the ability to make calls and text.

[00:04:14.490] - Doug

That's it. The last thing you want to do when you get back home is to find a...

[00:04:17.630] - Tracy

A huge bill. Yeah. I mean, we just keep our phones on their phone, don't we?

[00:04:21.810] - Doug

We do.

[00:04:22.540] - Tracy

So the other option is just to buy a SIM card, which you can do before you leave or when you get to the UK. So you'll find there's plenty of SIM cards for sale in the supermarkets and stores. Just make sure that your phone is unlocked and that you can swap it over.

[00:04:36.450] - Doug

That's it. I'm seeing the people flying in, lots of Heathrow, plenty of options and various places you can buy SIM cards and whatever.

[00:04:49.390] - Tracy

They can be quite reasonable. And then the other option is the new one, which is E SIM technology, which again, you have to check if your phone is E SIM enabled, is compatible, and that you can actually do it. So I haven't tried that yet. I'm also a bit shy of the SIM card thing because I'm terrified I lose my own SIM card. But I know that those are really popular and the E SIM might be something that I actually I'm going to give that a go, I think, because I've got a phone that can use it and it seems to be a really easy option to do that. So those are the options. I think we have got articles on the website so you can have a look at what our recommendations are and read a bit more detail about that to prepare yourself for accessing WiFi when you're in the UK. Question 3.

[00:05:37.810] - Doug

What type of plug adapter do I need and can I use my electrical appliances in the UK?

[00:05:44.690] - Tracy

This comes up a lot. Obviously, if you're coming from a country with a different plug arrangement to the UK, which is a G type plug, which has got three prongs, I will put an image of that in the show notes, you'll need to purchase an adapter. Obviously, you put your plug into it and then into the adapter and then plug it into socket.

[00:06:04.560] - Doug

That's the physical side of it. Your appliance, you need to check that it has a working voltage of 230 volts AC. That's the UK mains voltage. If this is not the case, you may need to buy a convertible or transformer.

[00:06:22.260] - Tracy

I think the important question with this, and what we do tell people is really you need to check your appliances when it comes to that. And really, if you've got any doubt about compatibility, do not use your appliance and risk hurting yourself or damaging equipment. It really is important to think about that.

[00:06:39.300] - Doug

Not worth the risk.

[00:06:39.910] - Tracy

Obviously, get an adapter. If you want to plug your things in, that's absolutely fine. But as I say, check if it's something... I know hair straighteners comes up quite a lot. Check that is something that you can use in the UK or not because of the fault.

[00:06:52.810] - Doug

Because I can honestly say I'll never need hair straighteners.

[00:06:55.700] - Tracy

No, you probably don't. That's probably because you haven't got much hair Doug.

[00:06:58.020] - Doug

No, but I have solar panels.

[00:06:59.370] - Tracy

Oh, is that what it is? Is that where all your wisdom comes from?

[00:07:02.520] - Doug

Oh, yes.

[00:07:04.440] - Tracy

Okay, then next question.

[00:07:06.040] - Doug

Question number 4, what should I tip? Who should I tip? And is it expected?

[00:07:11.350] - Tracy

Yeah. So tipping is not expected in the UK, but it's always appreciated. I think the big thing here, it's not expected. We've been in some countries in the world where really, they don't let you out of the train carriages that I do. That is correct. And so to give them a tip. So really, if you want to leave a tip for good service in a restaurant, 10 to 15 % is generally the rule of thumb. Sometimes you will find that the service fee has already been added. And if this is the case, tip will not be expected. Service charge. Service charge. Basically service charge. It's about 12 and a half % is what I can think of as being added. And often when you get to pay the bill, you'll have the opportunity to add that on if you're

paying via contactless. If you're in a cafe, you could leave. If you go to the till, there may be a little jar for tips and you can put a couple of coins in that. If you're in a pub and you order from the bar, there's no expectation to tip the barman. Obviously, in a hotel, you can if somebody brought up your bags, then you can tip a few pound at that point. If you're taking a London cab or a taxi, just round up the fare as appropriate, depending on the length of the journey, and round it up. I think it's important if you're taking... If you're taking some tours, again, think about, and we asked about this, tipping tour guides. And that really depends on group size, length of the tour, anything from £5 to £40.

[00:08:34.530] - Doug
Only tip good service.

[00:08:36.140] - Tracy
That is the thing. Yeah, absolutely. That's really important.

[00:08:39.660] - Doug
If you're unhappy with something, you don't make a scene, but you wouldn't consider tip.

[00:08:45.900] - Tracy
Yeah. And nobody's going to have a go at you if you don't tip, really. I mean, there's no expectation. And it really is about good service.

[00:08:52.230] - Doug
I know somebody does accept tips, though. That would that be us!

[00:08:55.560] - Tracy
Yeah, we do have a tip, you guide button on each page of your website. If you'd like to pass us a tip, we'd love it for all the information that we share. Okay. So tipping again, so really don't get too hung up on it. Next question, I guess, is five. What should I pack for spring, summer, autumn, winter? So the big thing to say here is the UK weather is pretty unpredictable.

[00:09:24.150] - Doug
Predictably unpredictable.

[00:09:25.220] - Tracy
Predictably unpredictable. Absolutely. So the main thing to think about is to pack layers, expect rain. If it doesn't rain, that's fantastic. We didn't get much rain last summer, actually, but you expect some rain. We did it in the summer. I think we did in May, but not so much over the summer month. It was actually really hot last year. So you can get pretty high temperatures. I mean, last year's exception went up to 42, which I think is about 105, 106 degrees Fahrenheit. So it was pretty hot. The main thing to do for packing really is to think layers. So just packing layers, I tend to try and go for similar colours so I can mix and match I think that's pretty good. So minute I'm all into it's all pinks and reds and oranges. That's my colour palette at the moment.

[00:10:13.490] - Doug
I should share my advice for blokes is wear the same clothes, whether it's hot, cold. I took change from trainers to sandals.

[00:10:22.810] - Tracy
That's true. You do wear shorts.

[00:10:24.290] - Doug
I do wear shorts, even with my legs.

[00:10:26.370] - Tracy
You do wear shorts. Just thinking layers, think about things that can match up, things like scarves. I quite like to take scarves. Comfortable shoes, that's really, really key. Make sure you've got something waterproof and comfortable. So next question.

[00:10:45.390] - Doug

How do I get from Heathrow to London to my hotel? Tracy's laughing. How long will it take? This is a difficult one for us to answer, not without having a crystal ball because we don't know where you're staying.

[00:11:00.780] - Tracy

And actually, we often get asked, how do I get from the airport to my hotel? I have no idea which airport you're at. No, we don't know which airport you're at and we don't know where your hotel is. So we can't make any assumptions.

[00:11:15.540] - Doug

It's a difficult one.

[00:11:16.670] - Tracy

It's really difficult to answer that question. And actually, to be honest, it's really easy to find that answer yourself on Google because if you booked a hotel, the hotel will tell you how to get there from whichever airport you've landed in, to be honest. Because we don't know every single hotel in London. We have to do exactly what you have to do and just Google it.

[00:11:37.880] - Doug

Most hotel websites have how to find us.

[00:11:41.420] - Tracy

Absolutely. But in terms of how to physically get from Heathrow or whichever airport into London. I'm talking about London. You have various options. They've got public transport options.

[00:11:53.410] - Doug

But that'd be the London underground, the tube, the train. By that, I mean the Heathrow Express, the Elizabeth line. You've got options.

[00:12:03.600] - Tracy

You can take a taxi, or you can do my personal favourite, which is a private transfer, because I've got to the point in my life, really, where I just like to walk out of the arrivals and have somebody standing there with my name on a piece of paper and whisking me to the car and then to my hotel. That's me. I've just got to that stage in my life.

[00:12:25.060] - Doug

You like your name in print.

[00:12:26.480] - Tracy

I do like my name in print. Yeah, absolutely. It's too relief. And you know what? I always think the main thing is, if you're arriving somewhere that you do not know in the world in a new airport and you've been flying for however many hours, really do you want to have to think about how you are then going to get from the airport to your hotel. So really, really plan this.

[00:12:48.950] - Doug

Especially if mobility isn't the easiest for you or you have children.

[00:12:55.430] - Tracy

Yeah. If you're arriving, there's five of you and lots of luggage and push chairs or whatever. Just to me, it's just worth the added expense of having a private transfer. That's what I do. You can take the tube. It's very easy to get on the tube from Heathrow, I think, to many places. And if your hotel is at the end of one of the tube stations on the big blue line, then it's just you then fair enough I guess or you want to just however you want to do it basically.

[00:13:21.790] - Doug

Yeah, just check what time you can get checked in.

[00:13:24.990] - Tracy

Yeah. So that one, obviously, there's various options. So it's up to you. Whatever you want. Whatever you're looking for. So how far in advance should I book things? So that is question number 7. Right. And this one, really, I've had so many disappointments or read so many things from people who are disappointed because they haven't booked places like Harry Potter Studios, or they haven't booked Highclere's, another one that comes up quite often. You really need to plan ahead and think about when you are booking things. So it obviously depends on when, where you are going. So if you are going in the middle of summer and peak season and you want to go somewhere like Harry Potter Studios, you need to get that booked. If you are going to the Isle of Sky in peak season, you need to book your accommodation. It's got to be done. You have to book that months in advance. So those really popular places, Edinburgh in August, Edinburgh in December for Hogmanay. You've got... Jacobite Experience. Yeah, Jacobite comes up all the time because people don't realise they need to book it. So I think the thing to do is you need to be really aware of what are those main things that get booked up. So just check online. Check online, find out when the booking opens and book it. Sky Garden is another one because that's free. But you have to go on the website and make sure that you book well in advance because the tickets will go. So I think they open up three weeks in advance. Get on there and book it. Ceremony of the keys at the tower of London, again, really popular that will get booked up well in advance. And if it's something that's really, really important to you, really stress, check and get it booked. Find your holiday, your itinerary around those things.

[00:15:10.050] - Doug

Saves disappointment.

[00:15:12.120] - Tracy

Absolutely. I mean, we booked Highclere last year and I'm so glad we did because that can be quite tricky to get into Highclere. And we had a wonderful day, really loved it. It was absolutely everything and more that we hoped for. And the Jacobite was amazing. But we had planned this, I reckon, six months before. I remember sitting up.

[00:15:28.950] - Doug

I was going to say you stayed up all night at the time.

[00:15:30.250] - Tracy

I did. I had to book the Jacobite first class because that's what we wanted. Again, think if you go in, if there's some places that you want to go to check, if it's a school holidays in the UK, season in the UK, if it's a weekend, places are going to be busier. So you're better off going places looking in the week.

[00:15:46.260] - Doug

That's right. And things like private tours. They get booked up.

[00:15:50.960] - Tracy

Absolutely. So if you want to do a private guided tour with Victoria and the Cotswolds or John England, South East England, or Cornwall, or Manage Tours, or any of our preferred driver tour guides, Mark and. You really need to get booked up with them because there's only one of them. So if you want to go out with them and do the tours, you have to plan well ahead. So I think that's an important point. So again, we've got articles to do with each of these questions on the website. So the next thing we get asked about is...

[00:16:23.750] - Doug

Where is the best place to stay in London or Bath, Edinburgh or York?

[00:16:29.320] - Tracy

Yeah. So that's a really difficult question for us to answer because really it depends on what your budget is, depends on your travel style. Do you prefer an Airbnb or do you want to stay in a five star hotel? How many of you are traveling, are you a large group? So there are more than five of you

wanting to move.

[00:16:50.580] - Doug

That's right. And do you want to be right next to public transport?

[00:16:53.990] - Tracy

Yeah, exactly. So it's a really difficult one to answer. But what we do have on the website is that we have extensive guides, basically, to most of the destinations around the UK. And if we haven't got it, we will be putting them on, about where to stay. So you can start off with our travel guides. So we have travel guides of Oxford and Cambridge and Bath and the Cotswolds, Edinburgh. We just got those Inverness, Fort William. So each destination has a travel guide. And off that, you will find some recommended accommodation options. And then from that, you'll get there'll be another actual dedicated post, which will tell you about the various areas in each location and then accommodation for various budgets, and again, with options for apartments for larger families and groups have also got articles. So you can find that information on the website. And obviously, things are important. You just need to, again, check. You need to do that homework about what is it exactly you want. For London, for example, where is it you want to stay in London?

[00:17:58.160] - Doug

Yeah. And how much time do you want to spend leaving your accommodation to get to the attraction because London is a big place.

[00:18:05.270] - Tracy

Absolutely. And it's worth sometimes it's worth splurging out for extra in your budget for those places just for the ease of access.

[00:18:12.680] - Doug

That's right. And if you're time poor and you're only there for a short time, you don't want to spend more time than actually necessary in travelling. Yeah, absolutely, totally. So question nine, do I need to take any cash with me to the UK? So we would say yes. A small amount, really. You don't need a huge amount, but I would not. We usually personally have about £50 on us. It's good to have a bit of change again for if you're going to give tips. Potentially, you may need it to access a public restroom. I'm trying to think, well, other occasions you might use it. I know you took a taxi last year and you had to pay cash.

[00:18:51.090] - Doug

That's right. Also, if you will be hiring a car, you can't count on paying for car parking with card.

[00:19:00.570] - Tracy

Absolutely.

[00:19:01.180] - Doug

A few times when we were travelling up and down the country, it was cash only wasn't it?

[00:19:05.060] - Tracy

It was, yes. So we're lucky we did have some. Another thing, obviously, things like Apple Pay, contactless, that are accepted in the UK. So that's absolutely fine. You can tap on and pay that way. To be honest, last year I remember paying in Nandos and I wasn't sure if they would take cash. I looked and said, Do you take cash?

[00:19:23.700] - Doug

And also if markets are your thing as well, I wouldn't always count that they take card.

[00:19:31.570] - Tracy

Exactly. It is becoming more the case that they take card, but don't assume that all of it is going to be. So just have a small amount. And as I say, if you like to go on tours or you like to tip, then have a little bit of cash to be able to do that with. And then question 10.

[00:19:48.480] - Doug
In London, do I need an oyster card or can I use contactless?

[00:19:53.840] - Tracy
Honestly, this is quite an emotion. I think this one, a lot of things, it really divides people. This one is. And you know what? It really is your preference. There are advantages and disadvantages to both, if you ask me. And I think what you need to do is weigh up the options for you, for you and your family and travel party. What will work for you? So an oyster card, it's very easy. You can buy one when you arrive.

[00:20:22.710] - Doug
You said what an oyster card is. An oyster card is the travel card that's used for transport for London.

[00:20:29.980] - Tracy
Yeah, to get around London. It's basically just a form of payment. So the money is loaded onto the card and you tap the card on and off on the tube. We like the oyster card because it just is secure because you put it in your pocket, you don't have to be worried about it. Whereas I don't particularly want to get my credit card out. So you have to think if you want to use contactless, fair enough, you could put that Apple Pay on your watch so that you don't have to take your phone out with credit card. That's an option. You obviously have to think if you're going to have bank charges from your bank back home, foreign fees for tapping on and off. So that's a disadvantage of using contactless. One advantage of contactless is that you don't have to keep topping it up, which with an oyster card, you just have to keep checking that you have got enough money on the oyster card. But really, it works the same way. You don't get charged anymore or any less.

[00:21:24.650] - Doug
No, it's still the last day of the capping. It's still exactly the same.

[00:21:28.410] - Tracy
We have people in the group very often go, I just use contactless and it was much easier than having to get an oyster card. Which is fine. Which is fine. And then we have an issue, I said, well, I had an oyster card and that really suited me because I didn't have to worry about it. I wasn't thinking, where is my credit card?

[00:21:42.450] - Doug
We're not promoting one or the other. It's about personal preference.

[00:21:45.100] - Tracy
Yeah. So again, we've got an article about what is an oyster card? We've got an article about an oyster card versus contactless. So you can read all about it for yourself. We've got numerous articles about travelling by public transport around the UK and in London as well. So I guess those are the top frequently asked questions that we get generally about visiting the UK. We are intending to do a dedicated podcast about Edinburgh. Top 10 frequently asked questions. Again, probably one about London as well, and a bit more focused on those. So if you've got any of those questions, pop in and join us in the group and you can add your questions. We'll make notes of them and potentially we'll answer those in the future podcast. But really for today, I think that sums it up, really. So I hope that's helped. I hope that has been useful. There are, as I say, articles which link to each of these questions, which will be in the show notes for this episode. You'll find that at uktravelplanning.com/episode-47. Again, remember, your best resource for travel to the UK is us. Our UK Travel Planning community website, products, newsletter, email list, everything. We've got absolutely everything really that you need to help find your perfect trip. We've been building this up for a few years now. So we appreciate every one of you for listening to this. It's brilliant. And again, I guess this just leaves us to say, as usual every week is Happy UK Travel Planning.